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SUBJECT: OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL: STATEMENT ON DRAFT LAW
ON RELIGION IN KYRGYZSTAN

11. POST IS AUTHORIZED TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT AT THE
NOVEMBER 20, 2008, MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL IN
VIENNA:

BEGIN TEXT:

THANK YOU, MR. CHAIRMAN.

THE UNITED STATES GENUINELY WELCOMES THE POSITIVE STEPS THE
KYRGYZ REPUBLIC HAS TAKEN TO EXPAND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND
TOLERANCE SINCE ITS INDEPENDENCE. IT IS IN THAT SPIRIT THAT
WE JOIN IN WITH RESPECT TO THE CONCERNS OF THE ODIHR ADVISORY
COUNCIL ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF ON THE DRAFT LAW ON
RELIGION PASSED BY THE KYRGYZ PARLIAMENT ON NOVEMBER 6TH.

AS REPORTED BY ODIHR, THE NEW LAW ADOPTED BY THE PARLIAMENT
DOES NOT APPEAR COMPATIBLE WITH SEVERAL OSCE COMMITMENTS ON
FREEDOM OF BELIEF AND ASSEMBLY. ACCORDING TO ODIHR,
PROVISIONS IN THE DRAFT LAW IMPOSE BURDENSOME CONSTRAINTS ON
AND BARRIERS TO REGISTRATION; THEY WOULD ALSO RESTRICT
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, INCLUDING THE DISSEMINATION OF
RELIGIOUS MATERIAL. OTHER PROVISIONS IN THE DRAFT LAW ARE
VAGUE, AND COULD INVITE CONFUSION AND VARIATIONS IN ITS
INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION BY AUTHORITIES.

TAKEN TOGETHER, WE BELIEVE THE EFFECTS OF AMENDMENTS WOULD
FALL DISPROPORTIONATELY ON RELIGIOUS MINORITIES, EFFECTIVELY
RESULTING IN DIMINISHED RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND TOLERANCE IN
THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC. THIS IS NOT AN OUTCOME THAT ANY OF US
CAN WANT, AS IT WOULD INVARIABLY BE INTERPRETED AS A
SIGNIFICANT STEP BACKWARD IN A COUNTRY THAT HAS COME SO FAR.

WE HOPE THE KYRGYZ MISSION TO THE OSCE WILL RELAY THESE
CONCERNS IN THE SPIRIT THEY WERE OFFERED, AND URGE PRESIDENT
BAKIEV TO RETURN THIS DRAFT LEGISLATION TO PARLIAMENT FOR
FURTHER REVIEW.

THANK YOU, MR. CHAIRMAN.

END TEXT.
RICE